

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 /087 W

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R 281520Z OCT 76

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7018

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 17267

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, BE, GT, UK

SUBJECT: BRITISH MILITARY DECISIONS IN BELIZE

REFERENCE: A) STATE 262948; B) BELIZE 869

SUMMARY: THE UK DECISION TO SEND 105MM HOWITZERS AND SCORPION VEHICLES TO BELIZE WAS TAKEN SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. HMG POSTPONED THE EXECUTION BECAUSE OF THE MINISTERIAL TALKS. THE DEPLOYMENTS ARE NOT REGARDED AS REINFORCEMENTS BUT AS PRUDENT PREPAREDNESS IN THE FACE OF INCREASED GUATEMALAN MILITARY ACTIVITY. THE FCO ASSERTS IT HAS KEPT ITS SIDE OF THE BARGAIN IN NOTIFYING GUATEMALA BUT THAT GUATEMALA HAS NOT FULFILLED ITS OWN OBLIGATIONS. THE BRITISH ARE CONVINCED OF THEIR GOOD FAITH IN THE DISPUTE WHICH THEY BELIEVE CONTRIBUTES TO THE GRADUAL ISOLATION OF GUATEMALA. END SUMMARY

1. EMBASSY OFFICER CALLED ON PATRICK DUFF, HEAD OF FCO WEST INDIAN AND ATLANTIC DEPARTMENT, TO DISCUSS THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF RECENT BRITISH MILITARY DECISIONS REGARDING BELIZE. HE SEEMED EAGER TO LAY OUT THE BACKGROUND.

2. DUFF BEGAN HIS EXPLANATION WITH A CURRENT ANALYSIS OF THE BELIZE SITUATION. THE TERM "STATUS QUO" CAN NO

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LONGER DESCRIBE THE DISPUTE, HE SAID. UNTIL 1974 THE

TERM WAS ADEQUATE AND CONVEYED A SENSE OF IMMJILITY
WHICH BOTH SIDES, FOR DIFFERING REASONS, FOUND ACCEPTABLE
AND EVEN DESIRAXXHEM BOTH SIDES SOUGHT TO MAINTAIN THE
T YSGIURQUO WITH DELI/4-53 8,-:58;856. BUT THE TERM NO
LONGER APPLIES, DUFF WENT
CIN E R OVER THE VW
T TWO
YEAZBK
F SO THE TZSUE HAS TAKEN ON A MOMENTUM OF ITS OWN
AND A LIFE OF ITS OWN. "IT CAN'T BE STOPPED", HE SAID
WITH SOME DRAMA, "AND THAT MAKES IT VERY DANGEROUS."

3. BRITAIN'S IMMEDIATE WORRY CENTERS ON THE RISKS IN-
VOLVED IN GUATEMALAN STRATEGY. "THEY WANT TO KEEP US
GUESSING," DUFF EXPLAINED. "WE ARE NEVER QUITE CERTAIN
WHERE WE STAND WITH THEM, NOT ON THE LAND ISSUE OR THE
TREATY ISSUE OR ANYTHING. IT IS USEFUL INTERNALLY FOR
THE GUATEMALANS TO KEEP THINGS BOILING ALONG. THEY KNOW
PRICE WON'T GO FOR INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT A SECURITY
GUARANTEE AND THEY ALSO KNOW WE WON'T GIVE ONE. SO THEY
CAN KEEP THE SITUATION CONSTANTLY UNSTABLE AND CONSTANTLY
ON EDGE." IT IS T
S CONTINUING STATE OF UNCERTAINTY THA
THE BRITISH FIND INHERENTLY DANGEROUS.

4. COMING BACK TO THE RECENT MILITARY DECISIONS, DUFF
SAID THAT THE INSTABILITY OF THE SITUATION MADE IT IMPOS-
SIBLE FOR HMG TO IGNORE THE STATE OF ITS DEFENSES IN
BELIZE. FIRST, HE POINTED OUT, WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT
BRITAIN HAD PULLED BACK BOTH THE HARRIERS AND AN INFANTRY
COMPANY LAST FEBRUARY. IT WAS HOPED THE WITHDRAWAL WOULD
HELP CREATE A FAVORABLE ATMOSPHERE FOR NEGOTIATIONS. BUT
WHEN IT BECAME APPARENT THAT THE ATLANTIC ROAD WOULD GIVE
GUATEMALA ANOTHER AVENUE OF ATTACK, MILITARY PRUDENCE
ARGUED FOR A NEW DEPLOYMENT. THE DECISION ON THE
HOWITZERS WAS IN FACT TAKEN SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, BUT
EXECUTION WAS DELAYED BECAUSE OF THE ONGOING MINISTERIAL
DISCUSSIONS. YET, SINCE EARLY SEPTEMBER, THE GUATEMALANS
HAVE SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASED THE NUMBER OF TROOPS IN THE
PETIN AREA AND PRESIDENT LAUGERUD'S RECENT PUBLIC STATE-
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MENTS CAN HARDLY BE CALLED CONCILIATORY. MOREOVER,
THERE IS GROWING CONCERN IN WHITEHALL OVER GUATEMALA'S
HEAVY ARMS PURCHASES NOW UNDERSCORED BY A NEW ORDER FROM
BRAZIL FOR THIRTY ARMORED CARS AND FIFTEEN APC'S. DUFF
SAID ALL THIS ACTIVITY FORMED A PICTURE WHICH SIMPLY
COULD NOT BE IGNORED.

5. DUFF THEN POINTED OUT THAT DESPITE THE MILITARY PIC-

TURE, THE BRITISH DECISION CANNOT BE CONSTRUED AS A REIN-
FORCEMENT. THE 105MM HOWITZERS ARE VIRTUALLY OBSOLETE
AND THE SIX SCORPIONS MERELY STANDARD REPLACEMENTS. HMG
DECIDED TO INFORM THE GUATEMALAN GOVERNMENT ON THE DAY OF
THE DEPLOYMENTS, FINDING THIS AN ACCEPTABLE COMPROMISE
BETWEEN THE MILITARY ARGUMENT FOR NOTIFICATION AFTER THE
FACT AND THE POLITICAL ARGUMENT FOR SOME FOREWARNING.
THE BRITISH PREFERRED NOT TO DISCUSS THE NUMBERS INVOLVED

NOTE BY OC/T: LONDON 17267 SECTION 1 OF 2 RECEIVED WITH PARAS 2 AND 3
GARBLED. CORRECTIONS WILL FOLLOW.

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7019

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 17267

FOR FEAR OF ESTABLISHING A PRECEDENT OF DETAILED INFORMA-
TION THAT MIGHT EVENTUALLY REQUIRE NOTIFICATION WHEN A
LANCE CORPORAL MOVES FROM ONE BUNK TO ANOTHER. "WE CAN-
NOT BE FOUND AT FAULT ON THE QUESTION OF NOTIFICATION,"
DUFF CONTINUED. "DESPITE NUMEROUS MILITARY MOVEMENTS AND
EXERCISES BY THE GUATEMALANS, THERE IS NOT ONE INSTANCE
OF THEIR NOTIFYING US IN ANY FASHION SINCE LAST AUTUMN.
NOT ONE." THE UK HAS FAITHFULLY FULFILLED ITS SIDE OF
THE BARGAIN WITH GUATEMALA, DUFF ASSERTED. AND BRITISH
MANPOWER IN BELIZE REMAINS BELOW A THOUSAND, HE SAID, BUT
THE FCO CONTINUES TO ARGUE AGAINST WHAT THE DEFENSE
MINISTRY CONSIDERS MILITARY IMPERATIVES.

6. DUFF DOES NOT SEE A REPETITION OF LAST AUTUMN'S NEAR CONFRONTATION WITH GUATEMALA. IN FACT, FOR THE MOMENT, RELATIONS ARE STILL BASICALLY AMICABLE. THE MINISTERIAL TALKS ARE INTACT AND WILL RESUME IN DECEMBER OR JANUARY; THE UN RESOLUTION IN NEW YORK PROMISES TO BE MODERATE IN TONE; WORKING LEVEL PARTIES ARE TOUCHING UP THE DRAFT TREATY. BUT, DUFF CAUTIONED, THE LONG TERM IS NOT PROMISING AND SHOULD THE ROWLANDS/MOLINA NEGOTIATIONS REACH AN IMPASSE, THE SITUATION COULD DETERIORATE RAPIDLY.

7. COMMENT: THE BRITISH BELIEVE THEIR RECORD OF GOOD
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FAITH AND SINCERITY IN DEALING WITH GUATEMALA IS UNBLEMISHED. THEY BELIEVE THEY HAVE DISCUSSED THE ISSUES OPENLY AND CONSTRUCTIVELY WHILE GUATEMALA HAS TOYED DANGEROUSLY WITH EACH PROBLEM. THEY BELIEVE THEY HAVE COMPROMISED THEIR OWN MILITARY PREPAREDNESS ONLY TO BE MET BY PROVOCATIONS IN RETURN. THEY FEAR THE INSTABILITY THAT COULD FOLLOW A BREAKDOWN IN THE TALKS AND DOUBT THERE IS ANY LONGER A STATUS QUO TO WHICH TO RETURN. AT THE SAME TIME, THE BRITISH ARE CONVINCED THEY ARE DEMONSTRATING A RECORD OF BEND-OVER-BACKWARDS SWEET REASONABLENESS IN THE FACE OF GUATEMALAN IRRATIONALITY, PREVARICATION AND INTRANSIGENCE. THE HOPE IS THAT THE BRITISH/BELIZE POSITION WILL FIND GROWING SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE WORLD WHICH IN TURN WILL INCREASINGLY PRESSURE AND ISOLATE GUATEMALA. AND FINALLY. THE AIM IS TO PREPARE FOR THE POSSIBLE DAY WHEN BRITISH PATIENCE RUNS OUT SO THAT NO ONE--INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES--CAN REASONABLY ASK THAT THEY DO MORE. ARMSTRONG

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